Socio-cultural change facing ranchers in the Rocky Mountain West as a result of mountain resort tourism and amenity migration

Abstract

In response to rural restructuring, many communities throughout the Rocky Mountain West have shifted from extractive and land-intensive industries to service-based economies, contributing to significant socio-cultural change for local residents, including ranchers. This exploratory study uses social capital as a heuristic device to examine ranchers' perspectives on the way in which mountain resort tourism and amenity migration have affected their patterns of socialization in the ranchlands surrounding Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Findings indicate the importance of both formal and informal bonding and bridging networks within the ranching community. While the introduction of amenity migrants and their differing perceptions on land ownership and management appear to have affected opportunities for informal rancher social interaction, both amongst one another and with their new neighbors, they seem to have encouraged ranchers to band together to protect their livelihoods through informal collective efforts and the formal creation of bridging networks. This indicates that conflict can instigate social capital development and contribute to positive outcomes, such as empowerment and grassroots democracy. Mountain resort tourism and amenity migration therefore appear to present both opportunities and challenges that are altering the nature of rancher social interactions, but not necessarily diminishing their social capital.

Keywords

Mountain resort tourism; social capital; ranching; community; ethnography

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the American West has experienced large-scale transition, with rapidly changing land use and migration patterns shifting its past reliance on ranching, mining, and forestry, to natural and cultural amenity-based development such as tourism and recreation (Nelson, 2001; Winkler, Field, Luloff, Krannich, & Williams, 2007). Much of this growth can be found in mountain resort communities, which attract large numbers of tourists and amenity migrants, defined as those individuals drawn to regions with outstanding natural environments, recreational opportunities, and high quality facilities and services (Glorioso & Moss, 2007). Such in-migration has dramatically transformed the economic and socio-cultural base of these communities, as they have become home to burgeoning tourism, construction, and real estate industries (Gosnell, Haggerty, & Travis, 2006). What has resulted is the transformation of the rural landscape, with rural restructuring – changes in migration patterns, technological developments and human-land relationships – leading to evolving and at times, disrupted individual and collective identities (Nelson, 2001).

Rural restructuring is not unique to rural communities in the American West (Robbins, Meehan, Gosnell & Gilbertz, 2009). What is of interest to researchers however, is how it has contributed to the shift from the "Old West" to the "New West"; regions that are "subsumed by a recreation-based and natural amenity driven economy" and characterized by rapid population growth (Winkler et al., 2007: 491). Rural restructuring has occurred against a backdrop of "tensions related to agricultural landscape change – and struggles over the identity of rural communities – taking place across the globe" (Abrams & Gosnell, 2012: 31). These changes have been ascribed to a number of factors, including declining terms of trade for agricultural produce, increasingly centralized production, the loss of employment in traditional industries, the rise of neo-liberal governments reducing dependency on agricultural subsidies and increasing interest by the middle class in moving from urban to

rural places (Abrams & Gosnell, 2012; Larsen, Sorenson, McDermott, Long & Post, 2007; Marsden, 1998).

Researchers have argued that the metamorphosis from the Old West to the New West has had significant effects on traditional activities, such as ranching within regions surrounding mountain resort communities (Shumway & Otterstrom, 2001). The increased desirability of these places has led to rising property values of adjacent ranchlands, encouraging ranchers to sell and subdivide to accommodate amenity migrants (Riebsame, Gosnell & Theobald, 1996; Theobald, Gosnell & Riebsame, 1996). These amenity migrants have brought with them new ideas regarding land ownership and management that may conflict with existing customs (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011; Yung & Belsky, 2007). This "culture clash" (Smith & Krannich, 2000), can result in tensions and conflict and a sense of "otherness" that separates amenity migrants and long-standing residents (Armstrong & Stedman, 2013).

However, clashes in values towards land use and management have arguably been overstated in some regions. While studies have shown differences in priorities regarding land management considerations such as wildlife and wildfire (Haggerty & Travis 2006; Travis, 2007), research also indicates significant common ground between newcomers and existing residents (Nelson, 2001). Thus, as argued by Robbins et al. (2009), a more relevant focus of inquiry might be examining the processes that produce, maintain, or erode socio-cultural and economic similarities or differences among residents in what are increasingly dynamic exurban spaces. Further, a more sophisticated understanding of rural space has emerged, illustrated by Marsden's (1998: 111) observation that the growth in agricultural diversification "requires the development of new connections and networks" and Domon's (2011: 339) call for research that explores the "dynamics" that are created by "the importance of social demand for landscapes and newer forms of rural territory occupation".

This study aims to explore these issues and suggestions further by applying the concept of social capital as a heuristic device to examine rancher perspectives on the socio-cultural changes resulting from mountain resort tourism development within the ranchlands surrounding Steamboat Springs, Colorado. While social capital has increasingly been used to study socio-cultural processes of community change and development (Butler & Robson, 2001; Onyx & Bullen, 2000), its application to the field of rural restructuring is currently limited, despite its focus on complex sociological processes. The ability of social capital to identify and examine changing sociological interactions within rural landscapes undergoing restructuring should therefore be recognized.

This exploratory ethnographic study builds on research by Larsen et al., (2007) and Larsen and Hutton (2012), which explore socio-cultural values, meanings and interactions within ranching landscapes in Colorado undergoing rural restructuring. However, this research uses the shifting patterns and flows of social capital as a lens for examining socio-cultural processes, as compared to explaining differing norms, attitudes towards local governance, and socio-economic status in an “old” versus ‘new” framework. The aim is to facilitate a better understanding of rancher perspectives on socio-cultural changes brought about by tourism.

It is important to note that tourism is not the sole contributor to socio-cultural change within the ranchlands of the Rocky Mountain West, with broader shifts in ranch consolidation, the transfer of ranch ownership to amenity migrants, and accompanying changes in land use for conservation, fishing or ranchette development also evident in counties without the presence of tourist resorts (Gosnell et al., 2006). Nevertheless, within the region of Routt County, mountain resort development has had significant influence over the ownership and management of ranchlands over the years, making it a useful case study of the changing dynamics of rural communities.

2. Literature review

2.1 Mountain resort tourism and ranching within the Rocky Mountain West

Within the Rocky Mountain West, the growth and development of mountain resort tourism has significantly affected ranchers in several ways. While ranching has historically been the economic mainstay for many communities, the conversion of ranchlands for tourism and real estate has dramatically increased their value, often far beyond their agricultural production value (American Farmland Trust, 2000). In particular, the desire for real estate by amenity migrants has exacerbated the rapid rise in land value, with the subsequent lack of affordable housing and rural sprawl forcing permanent residents and tourism workers to live in adjacent areas where costs of living are more affordable (Gill and Clark, 2006).

This has contributed to the subdivision of nearby ranches to meet additional housing needs, resulting in the loss of ranching operations and open space (Gosnell & Travis, 2005; Travis, 2007). Of particular concern to ranchers has been the development of “ranchettes”; luxury non-commercial ranching properties of relatively small acreage (35 acres or less) that are subdivided from larger ranches and sold as private residences (Mitchell, Knight, & Camp, 2002). These ranchettes fragment large tracts of open ranchland (Holechek, 2001), creating a landscape matrix that includes the resort community and working ranches, surrounded by isolated residential subdivisions inhabited by permanent and semi-permanent amenity migrants.

By attracting predominantly affluent amenity migrants with their own expectations, values, and constructions of rurality, such development has brought about significant socio-cultural change for ranchers (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011). Increased numbers of amenity migrants has created a dichotomy between those who practice traditional western livelihoods and those drawn to what are perceived to be idyllic, peaceful rural landscapes (Baron,

Theobald & Fagre, 2000). This can result in contested meanings of place and differing norms regarding land use and value, which may clash with the reality of everyday ranching practices and lead to neighborly conflicts and the contested use of space (Shumway & Otterstrom, 2001). In time, these issues can translate into a higher proclivity to sell, with ranchette development further encouraging the sale and subdivision of working ranches.

However, as acknowledged by Larsen et al. (2007) and Larsen and Hutton (2012), while such conventional divisions between newcomers and old timers are evident, a broader and more complex discourse of "co-opetition" can also be noted. Rather than competing with one another, these changing residents are balancing desires for independence with the periodic need for mutual support (Larsen et al. 2007). This contrasts with the previous interdependence shared by many long-time residents.

This highlights the need to further examine the socio-cultural interactions that exist among residents within regions experiencing rural restructuring, and those processes that are creating divisions or identifying underlying similarities in what are viewed as divergent populations. Additionally, given that much of the conflict discussed above is associated with land management practices between traditional ranching practices and amenity uses, knowledge of how both of these can coexist is also important. Finally, rancher socialization patterns have long played a central role in sharing knowledge on ranching operations and land management (Knapp & Fernandez-Gimenez, 2009), and informal social controls such as norms, expectations and relationships have historically contributed to a system of governance based on shared values (Ellickson 1991). These factors are currently being challenged by the influx of amenity migrants, with new residents causing tensions due to differing values placed on things like private property boundaries (Yung & Belsky, 2007).

This exploratory study adopts an in-depth qualitative approach to research, with social capital used as a conceptual tool to examine both the formal and informal social interactions of ranchers. This is due to its ability to acknowledge the deep-rooted cultural traditions and values that influence the way we socialize, interact, and manage our resources (Barraket, 2005).

2.2 Social capital

Social capital has become an increasingly popular concept for examining the social processes of change and the outcomes of social interaction. It can be used to focus on patterns and types of network formation between individuals and communities; shared norms; the distribution and use of resources; and the associated exercise of power that influences behavior amongst network members (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Although no single universal definition exists, common consensus regarding the central importance of networks, norms, and resources has led to their widespread acceptance as key components and identifiable points of reference (Onyx, 2005). Social capital can therefore be conceptualized as the social networks, norms, and resources that facilitate cooperation and collective action at both an individual and collective level.

Networks form the structural element of social capital, with both formal and informal connections assisting in sharing knowledge, values, beliefs, and ideas (Field, 2003). *Norms* are the internal valuations that people attach to particular types of actions (Ostrom, 2003); the expectations, whether their own, that of others, or both, as to whether an action is right or wrong (Coleman, 1987). These include trust and reciprocity, both of which exist in personalized and generalized forms.

Personalized trust refers to the trust that we have in people we know, while generalized trust is the trust extended towards strangers (Pretty & Ward, 2001). Personalized reciprocity is the straightforward "quid pro quo" exchange between two individuals (Glanville & Bienenstock, 2009), whereas generalized reciprocity assumes that kindness will be returned at some point in the future, but not necessarily by those who benefited from the action (Newton, 1997).

Finally, *resources* are those goods which are valued within a society and embedded within an individual's networks or associations (Lin, 1999). These can be either personal or social, with personal resources being those possessed by the individual (money, knowledge, skills), while social resources are those accessed through both direct and indirect connections. It is these social resources which constitute a component of social capital, but only once activated and mobilized within a network structure (Lin, 2001).

Beyond these components, different types of social capital have also been identified, with a common distinction made between bonding and bridging social capital. *Bonding social capital* refers to the localized trust and reciprocity that can be found within tightly-knit networks (Stone & Hughes, 2002). These close social ties reinforce exclusive identities by creating strong in-group loyalty and a sense of solidarity (Putnam, 2000). Communities that exhibit high levels of bonding social capital are often less open and defined by their exclusivity (Dale, 2005).

Conversely, *bridging social capital* refers to those networks that are open and encourage generalized reciprocity. Such an inclusive orientation encourages collaborative initiatives that may help achieve communal goals (Putnam, 2000). Another form of bridging social capital has also been identified - *linking social capital.* This specifically concerns power and resources, connecting across asymmetrical levels of status and influence (Halpern,

2005). Whereas bridging social capital focuses on the development of horizontal networks between groups of similar status and power, linking social capital refers to those vertical networks made between groups of unequal status and power.

Research on rural communities in Australia has explored the existence and form of social capital, identifying high levels of bonding social capital, as characterized by high levels of participation in the local community, feelings of trust and safety, and strong mutual support (Barraket, 2005; Onyx & Bullen, 2000). Yet, these rural communities also tend to exhibit lower levels of bridging social capital, as characterized by tolerance of diversity (Onyx & Bullen, 2000). Such findings are relevant to the context at hand, with the introduction of newcomers commonly seen as threatening to existing relationships, values and norms held by what are commonly tight-knit communities in the Rocky Mountain West (Armstrong & Stedman, 2013).

This example of the simultaneous existence of the various components and types of social capital highlight the multi-dimensional nature of the construct (Dale, 2005). Yet despite the current lack of definitional consensus, there has been a tendency within the academic literature to try to quantitatively measure social capital through a range of indicators (Portes, 2000). Dale (2005), however, argues that a focus on measurement may actually result in a loss of the integrity of the concept; most importantly, its complex and multidimensional nature. Qualitative methods that focus on the "how" and "why" may instead be more appropriate for examining these sociological aspects of community life (Schuller, 2000).

This study therefore adopts a qualitative approach, using social capital as a heuristic device; a guiding construct that assists in exploring social phenomena (Schuller, 2000). In this manner, social capital is a conceptual tool, with its various components and types used to

focus upon particular areas of sociological interest, rather than delineate clear boundaries (Onyx, 2005). This qualitative approach to using social capital arguably facilitates a more nuanced examination of the interrelated and overlapping nature of social interaction among ranchers, as a result of amenity migration and mountain resort tourism development.

3. Research Design and Approach

This exploratory study adopted a social constructivist ontology that acknowledges the multiple meanings that are constructed as people engage and form relationships with the world around them (Crotty, 1998). Ethnography and case study research inquiry were identified as complementary and suitable methodological approaches, given their ability to explore phenomena of interest and provide powerful and detailed insight within the research context (Brunt, 2007; Yin, 2003). Data for this study came from a broader ethnographic study examining the socio-cultural sustainability of tourism development that spanned over two five month periods covering the peak winter and summer tourism seasons, from November 20th, 2010 until April 23rd, 2011; and from July 3rd 2011 until November 18th 2011. Data were collected by the principal researcher, where she embraced the role of a "participant-as-observer" (Gold, 2001). By actively immersing herself amongst subjects and participating within their daily lives, intimate familiarity with the research setting and those within it was achieved.

Data collection methods included qualitative interviews and participant observation. Table 1 provides a brief explanation of the eight interviews that were conducted with ranchers and members of ranching-related organizations, such as the Routt County Extension Office, Community Agriculture Alliance, and The Nature Conservancy. Purposive sampling identified individuals who possess detailed knowledge and familiarity of the region and

community (Jennings, 2001), while snowball sampling provided access to interviewees who were referred and recommended by others (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). All interviews were face-to-face and lasted approximately one to two hours, with a basic interview guide ensuring that key research themes were sufficiently explored. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed, before being sent back to the interviewee for member checking to ensure accurate representation.

Insert Table 1.

Participant observation involved the immersion of the principal researcher in the everyday lives of her subjects. This included participation in the day-to-day activities of the community of Steamboat Springs, as well as participation in ranching-specific activities and events, such as the Routt County Fair and Ranch Rendezvous; attending city and county meetings where ranching-tourism disputes were discussed; and making detailed observations of ranchers on ranch visits. All of these observations were contemporaneously recorded in a field journal to provide "incontestable description" on what was happening within the case (Stake, 1995). Equal weighting was given to all data sources and methods, with their combination providing a detailed and integrated narrative of the sociological changes facing ranchers within Routt County.

All data were subjected to a qualitative content analysis that explored relevant themes as they arose in the field. These themes formed the conceptual and analytical structure of this case study, and were informed through examination of such studies as Archer and Lonsdale (2003), Baron, et al., (2000), Brunson and Huntsinger (2008), Gosnell, et al. (2006), Gosnell and Travis (2005), Holechek (2001), Mitchell et al. (2002). They included changing land patterns, prices, and land use; ranch ownership and management; shifting cultural values and expectations, among others. Data were then further analyzed in regards to the social

networks, norms, and resources that make up social capital to understand how these themes have influenced the existence and development of social capital amongst ranchers.

Data analysis and reduction involved the use of both the NVivo 9 data analysis software package and manual data analysis techniques. NVivo 9 helped with the analysis of data obtained through participant observation, with the data analysis software assisting in thematic identification and categorization of a large amount of data. At the same time, manual techniques were used to analyze interview transcripts. This involved the examination of hard copies of the transcripts through highlighting passages, writing notes, re-writing relevant quotations and themes, and making elaborate notes within page margins, while listening to the audio recordings. By analyzing the written words of interviewees while simultaneously listening to their voice intonation, inflections, and pace of speech, a more accurate representation of the actual interview was provided than would have been possible using NVivo software.

Data relating to mountain resort tourism development and ranching were categorized under various broad-level nodes or headings, such as “unaffordability of ranchland”, “importance of ranchlands and open space”, “rancher support and assistance”, importance of community for ranchers”, and so forth, before being further categorized into sub-groups to form detailed tree diagrams. Table 2 is an excerpt from the manual data analysis process that depicts how some of the various themes and sub-themes were identified and categorized. Due to limited time, the practice of inter-coder reliability, where multiple researchers code the same data to identify any discrepancies, was not undertaken.

Insert Table 2.

The importance of reflexivity within ethnography must also be acknowledged. Reflexivity refers to an awareness of the presence and position of the researcher and their

interaction with the researched (Emerson, 1987). The interactions and experiences of the principal researcher formed a vital component of this study and are therefore included as data. These include observations of her own personal experiences and thoughts regarding ranching and mountain resort tourism, which were recorded alongside those of her subjects.

4. Case study context

Steamboat Springs is located in Routt County within the north-west corner of the state of Colorado, approximately 156 miles northwest of Denver within the Rocky Mountain West (see Figure 1). The township has a permanent population of approximately 12,000 people and is the largest within the county. It is home to Steamboat Ski and Resort on Mt Werner, an internationally renowned ski resort, and has also been trademarked as Ski Town, U.S.A® for its long history of skiing and its record of producing the greatest number of winter Olympians in the United States.

Insert Figure 1.

Steamboat Springs was selected as a case study for examining how mountain resort tourism development and amenity migration has brought about sociological change for ranchers, as it is one of only a few internationally-renowned ski resort destinations that also remains as a working agricultural community. In other resort destinations, such as Aspen, CO and Vail, CO, working agricultural land has given way to the demands of tourism development, amenity migration, and the broader shift towards rural restructuring. While the direct economic value of ranching only accounts for less than a half of one per cent of the total personal income earned within the county (Yampa Valley Partners, 2009/10), its indirect contribution through its scenic value for both residents and tourists remains significant, with the proposed conversion of ranchland to urban uses within Routt County found to equate to

an $8 million USD decrease in tourism earnings for the Steamboat Springs economy (Ellingson & Siedl, 2009).

Ranchers were central focus of this exploratory research, due to their significance as a continuous link to the Western ranching culture and heritage of Steamboat Springs. This study adopts a similar definition of ranchers to that used by Yung and Belsky (2007) and Gosnell et al. (2006). They are defined as individuals or families who permanently reside in the area, self-identify as ranchers, and raise livestock. While some engage in additional work off the ranch, they depend primarily on livestock production for their livelihood. However, local ranch managers who do not own ranchland, but lease land for ranching purposes, were also considered as ranchers in this study. This is because many of these ranch managers are sons and daughters of established ranching families within the region, who work as ranchers but cannot afford to purchase their own land. In comparison, semi-permanent and permanent amenity migrants include those who do not depend on livestock production as their primary source of income and are largely drawn to these rural lands for their peaceful setting within close proximity to a mountain resort town.

The rapid growth of mountain resort tourism over the years has brought about significant changes to ranching across the county. Since 1954, there has been a decline in large-scale ranches of more than 180 acres in Routt County, from 426 down to 225 (United States Department of Agriculture, 2007). During this same period, there has been a corresponding increase in the number of ranches of less than 180 acres, from 127 to 335. Given that the total acreage of ranchland has remained similar over the years, these figures indicate the increased subdivision of land into smaller parcels (Routt County Planning Department, 2003). In particular, 64 per cent of the total acreage of ranchland sold within Routt County from 1990 to 2001 (156,203 acres) has gone to amenity migrants (many of

whom are absentee owners), followed by investors, developers, and then ranchers (Gosnell & Travis, 2005).

The subdivision of ranchlands for ranchette development can also be seen when comparing maps of 35-acre subdivisions within Routt County from 2002 to 2009. While ranchland of over 350 acres still dominates, changes can be noted in the immediate vicinity of the township of Steamboat Springs where the already fragmented landscape has been further broken down into land parcels under 140 acres. This is particularly the case on the western side of Steamboat Springs, with downvalley sprawl occurring along the major transportation arterials of the U.S 40 towards Hayden and the CR 131 to Oak. Additionally, the creation of land parcels under 70 acres has increased in Northern Routt County around Steamboat Lake, where a growing number of ranchettes have been developed for amenity use.

Insert Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 4 is a photo taken in 2011, which depicts the rural landscape directly south of Steamboat Springs. This highlights the extent of rural subdivision, with the fragmented nature of the landscape emphasized by the many ranchettes that dot the open valley floor and scenic ridgelines.

Insert Figure 4.

Statistics for Routt County show that the median sale price for a single-family home rose from $230,000 USD in 1998 to $422,300 in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In Steamboat Springs, real estate values have experienced even greater inflation, with the average price of a single family home worth approximately $700,000 USD in 2010 (Yampa Valley Housing Authority, 2010). This is in comparison to the national average of $242,300

USD in 2011 for all new homes sold (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). At the same time, per capita income in Routt County has nearly doubled since 1999, and the amount of income derived from non-labor sources, such as retirement benefit payments and investments, has increased by 10% over the last ten years, indicating the growing presence of amenity migration within the region (Yampa Valley Partners, 2014/15).

Broader social, economic, and political forces, such as ranch consolidation and the rise in immigrant labor (see for example Archer & Lonsdale, 2003), are also acknowledged as potentially affecting ranchers. However, within Routt County, it is the rapid growth of mountain resort tourism and the associated development of real estate that appears to be the driving force behind much of the socio-cultural, economic, and environmental change. Additionally, while there are some immigrant workers utilized on ranches within the county, the small-medium sized nature of many of the ranches in the region means that demand for immigrant workers is more significant within the tourism and amenity migrant service industries (Nelson, Nelson & Trautman, 2014), than in ranching.

5. Research findings and discussion

5.1 Cooperation within the ranching community

Interviews and participant observation of ranchers identified cooperative behavior governed by personalized norms of trust and reciprocity as a defining feature of rancher relationships within Routt County. As explained by Interviewee 3 (I-3), a second-generation rancher: *"Going back to when my dad moved to Clark in 1949, it was critical that you worked together with your neighbors"*, with cooperation being a longstanding necessity due to the limited resources commonly available. Additional conversations with other ranchers also emphasized the importance of working together to *"get things done"*, with the branding and herding of cattle, maintenance of fences, and spraying of weeds all cited examples of reciprocal behavior.

This cooperation and reciprocity amongst ranchers was described as a source of security and comfort that has allowed them to develop a shared sense of expectation and obligation; both of which are contributing factors to the formation of durable social bonds (Glanville & Bienenstock, 2009). As I-3 explained of his longstanding relationship with another rancher, with whom he commonly trades labor during haying season and for barn repairs and construction: *"He knows that I'm up the river if he needs help and he's not there by himself*".

While ranchers are not an entirely cohesive segment within Routt County, their mutual need for assistance over the years has established a common understanding of the importance of helping one another, in spite of any personality conflicts and past disputes. Social capital in the form of personalized trust and reciprocity thus appears to have played a vital role in assisting them in overcoming divergent interests over time (Cox & Caldwell, 2000). Such examples of reciprocal behavior amongst ranchers are consistent with previous

research (see Ellickson, 1991; Yung & Belsky, 2007), emphasizing the importance of social obligations and expectations as informal rules that govern their social relationships.

5.2 Amenity migration as a driver of socio-cultural change: Challenges to rancher norms of trust and reciprocity

From the perspective of all of the ranchers interviewed and observed, the introduction of amenity migrants has had a significant effect on the existing socio-cultural landscape. The sale and subdivision of working ranches for ranchette development was described as having contributed to an overall net loss of ranchers within the county, creating holes in the social structure of the ranching community. This has physically separated ranches from one another, limiting opportunities for informal "over-the-fence" conversations, and thereby the frequency in which ranchers can interact. As described by I-1, a third-generation rancher:

It used to be you had a family ranch here and a family ranch here and a family ranch here. What has now happened is that this one may have been saved, this one may have sold to someone who is now a second-home owner….And so the distance between this [ranch] and this [ranch] has become even greater because you don't even share fences, you may not share your water, any of that type of thing anymore.

This is exacerbated by the fact that many amenity migrants reside in the county on a semi-permanent basis. Of the ranchers interviewed, most indicated that their amenity migrant neighbors typically only spend several months a year in Routt County, being their second or third home.

Given that opportunities for informal socialization not only form the basis of long-standing cooperative relationships (Ellickson, 1991), but are also important ways in sharing

local knowledge and best practices between ranchers (Knapp & Fernandez-Gimenez, 2009), the diminished frequency of informal interactions appears to have negatively affected social capital maintenance and development. Ranchers have found it increasingly difficult to maintain existing bonding networks with other ranchers due to their physical separation. Furthermore, the semi-permanent nature of many amenity migrants has prevented ranchers from establishing new bridging networks that share and enforce the norms of trust and reciprocity required for the successful management of their ranching operations. In this manner, the physical fragmentation of the ranchlands surrounding Steamboat Springs has also contributed to the social fragmentation of ranchers.

Amenity migration has also introduced different cultural perceptions regarding land use. According to the Routt County Master Plan and discussions with ranchers and community residents involved in the development of the plan, the attractiveness of "residential privacy, peace, and quiet" (Routt County 2003, p.16) is an important reason for purchasing ranchland. Common themes of "solitude" and "isolation" also emerged from conversations with amenity migrants. Such a desire to escape is at odds with the widely-held expectation of ranchers regarding strong community relationships that encourage cooperative behavior. As one rancher and his wife explained, *"they [amenity migrants] came here to get away from neighbors, rather than be neighbors"*.

Not surprisingly, these differing perceptions have given rise to various disputes regarding the expectations accompanying land ownership. One example of this was recounted by I-3, a second-generation rancher, who went to move his cattle, only to find that access to the neighboring property had been blocked by the new owners (amenity migrants seeking privacy and solitude). He was shocked, as this access had been informally granted to his family for generations by the previous owners. The result was a letter of trespass served by lawyers representing these amenity migrants, with I-3 forced to either hire a lawyer to contest

this issue, or move his cattle using an alternative route. Although such informal customs and expectations regarding the flexibility of property boundaries for the benefit of neighboring ranchers are not legally sanctioned, they are powerful social forces that govern neighborly relationships, with the failure of newcomers to adhere to these informal customs often becoming a source of contestation (Yung & Belsky, 2007)

Land management practices of amenity migrants was another area of tension raised by ranchers. These concerns are supported by the Routt County Open Lands Plan, with the semi-permanent status of many amenity migrants identified as contributing to what is commonly a one acre home-site surrounded by 34 acres of poorly maintained land (Conservation Partners Inc., 1995). Conversations with several ranchers identified weed control, in particular, as an issue resulting from poor land management. Additionally, the desire to "beautify" ranchland has caused further tensions as the decisions made on one property can affect others. During one ranch visit, the principal researcher was shown how an upstream decision to "straighten" the Elk River for scenic purposes had placed additional pressure on downstream riverbanks, causing a blowout on a neighboring ranch when the snow melted in the spring.

From a social capital perspective, these conflicting values appear to have limited the development of inclusive bridging networks between ranchers and amenity migrants. Given that individuals are more likely to participate in reciprocal behavior if there is trust that their actions will be reciprocated in the future (Coleman, 1988), the decision by many amenity migrants to isolate themselves and make decisions that affect neighboring ranches without prior discussion has affected the generalized trust and reciprocity shared between these two groups. In turn, limited opportunities for communication between ranchers and amenity migrants have minimized the ability of ranchers to exchange resources in the form of labor and knowledge with their new neighbors. This is because generalized trust and reciprocity

play a central role in helping individuals to access resources and mediate exchanges within social networks (Putnam, 2000).

The manner in which some amenity migrants have dealt with land management disputes has further affected norms of generalized trust and reciprocity. As discussed above, ranchers in Routt County and throughout the American West have traditionally been governed by a cultural system that relies upon adherence to cooperative norms of trust and reciprocity (Ellickson, 1991; Yung & Belsky, 2007). Preference is therefore given to the informal resolution of neighborly disputes and community issues. This does not mean that more formal mechanisms do not play a role in maintaining order, but "over-the-fence" conversations between ranchers to settle concerns are commonly seen as more desirable. In contrast, amenity migrants were noted by both ranchers and Routt County employees as preferring more formal methods of dispute resolution. As described by I-1, a third-generation rancher:

When you have trouble with that fence line, it used to be that neighbor just went and talked to them [new landowner] and said, 'You know, we've got to get this squared away and I'll get my cattle off your place'. What happens now is that this landowner will pick up his phone, call his lawyer and have your lawyer call. So it's presented a whole different set of dynamics for those of us who have never dealt with lawyers, you know?

While this use of lawyers may derive from a lack of awareness of ranching norms and expectations, or serve a practical function, given the semi-permanent nature of many amenity migrants, this has been interpreted by many ranchers as further evidence of the unwillingness of amenity migrants to develop positive social relationships. The choice to use lawyers and contracts has brought about a shift from trusting and reciprocal informal relations to the enforcement of formal sanctions. In response, several ranchers expressed their hesitancy in

forming relationships with their new neighbors, further contributing to the dissipation of social capital in the form of generalized trust. As noted by I-5, a representative from a ranching-related non-profit organization: *"It's like, what happened to our community? It used to be the handshake community"*.

Yet, closer examination suggests that while many rancher-amenity migrant relationships do appear strained, this does not necessarily equate to an overall decrease in social capital for ranchers. Rather, while relationships with amenity migrants have become increasingly formalized, the personalized sense of trust and reciprocity shared amongst ranchers appears to have been reinforced, as they unite over common concerns. Therefore, what at first appears to be a loss of social capital may instead be a *transformation* from generalized to more personalized trust and reciprocity that is shared within already established bonding networks.

While these findings describe many of the rancher-amenity migrant relationships within Routt County, there was anecdotal evidence of some bridging networks between ranchers and amenity migrants. As explained by several ranchers, some amenity migrants have gone to great lengths to build positive relationships with ranchers, attending community meetings, learning about the local culture and expectations, and generously lending their time and resources, in the form of new equipment and knowledge to improve methods of getting things done. However, these individuals were identified by most ranchers as typically being the exception, with most choosing to remain apart from their neighbors. As acknowledged by I-4, a representative of a ranching-related organization: *"the biggest internal challenge [faced by ranchers] is the new people coming and their willingness to buy into the culture"*. This acceptance of the local ranching culture by amenity migrants is important, with the long-established norms of trust and reciprocity forming the underlying incentive for the mutual assistance which ranchers so heavily rely upon.

5.3 Informal rancher collective action

While the encroachment of mountain resort tourism and amenity migration has brought with it growing tensions between ranchers and their new neighbors, such conflicts were also found to be instigators of social change, encouraging ranchers to informally unite to address perceived external threats to their livelihood. This has further developed social capital in the form of resource mobilization and linking social capital, as exemplified in the actions leading up to the creation of the Routt County Open Lands Plan.

Throughout the 1990s, escalating tensions between ranchers and amenity migrants in Routt County had reached a point where the daily operations of ranchers were impeded by nuisance complaints. Analysis of county documents from that time identified the use of machinery in the mornings, chemical spraying for weed control, and trespassing as key amenity migrant concerns. As acknowledged by I-8, a rancher, *"You couldn't even start your tractor in the morning without fear of upsetting your neighbor"*.

In response, ranchers explained that they had no choice but to come together to lobby county government for increased protection from such complaints. Government assistance was noted as necessary by several county employees, as ranchers were often unable to contact their new neighbors, and amenity migrants preferred to deal directly with county representatives. Newspaper articles and minutes from public meetings, indicated widespread participation of ranchers in the form of written and face-to-face complaints to county officials. This pressure placed by ranchers on local government representatives led to the development of a steering committee.

According to Shutkin (2001), this steering committee was comprised of a diverse group of residents, including ranchers, and adjudicated public meetings over a nine-month period where ranching-amenity migrant issues and potential solutions were discussed. This resulted in the Routt County Open Lands Plan in 1995, which outlines various strategies to protect ranching and the rural landscape from the growth and development associated with mountain resort tourism and amenity migration. In particular, the implementation of a Right-To-Farm Ordinance has been instrumental in mediating rancher-amenity migrant relationships, protecting ranchers from any legal challenge as a result of inconveniences caused in the normal pursuit of ranching (Conservation Partners Inc., 1995). While many ranchers acknowledge that these measures have not changed amenity migrants' preference for solitude and isolation, they have minimized formal complaints and provide a common basis of understanding regarding the rights and obligations surrounding ranchland ownership within the county.

This example highlights the existence of *associational power*; the medium through which resources and obligations are pooled and activated to effectively facilitate collective action (Parsons, 1963). These resources and obligations form a key component of social capital, and include local knowledge, familiarity with county government processes, social relationships, and shared expectations of involvement. With rancher-amenity migrant tensions providing the catalyst for collective action, ranchers came together to utilize such resources and obligations to demonstrate how effective their collective efforts can be.

This mobilization also indicates the development and existence of linking social capital. Through utilizing existing informal bonding networks, ranchers were able to pool information and resources to undertake targeted lobbying and public protests that bridged power differentials. This capacity to move from bonding to linking social capital is indicative of grassroots democracy; self-determined attempts to address various challenges. While this

is not the first time that ranchers in this region, or elsewhere, have come together to address an outside threat, it shows how land use changes can encourage the development of social capital amongst ranchers, as they work together to collectively address associated concerns. Such success provides ranchers with a sense of empowerment, and a continued willingness to act collectively to protect their interests through both formal and informal channels. As noted by I-4, a representative of a ranching-related organization:

The ag [agricultural] voices are [well] represented within the wider place, probably disproportionately for our economic contribution. You know, we have some great leadership here both in the ag community and outside the ag community…So, we are in all honesty, we're well represented politically.

Rancher-amenity migrant tensions can therefore result in positive outcomes for ranchers, particularly when sufficient levels of social capital already exist within a community to help facilitate the necessary collective action.

5.4 The creation of formal ranching-tourism collaborations

In addition to their informal collective efforts, ranchers within Routt County have also established several organizations to address tourism and amenity-based development concerns. These grassroots initiatives provide non-government alternatives through which ranchers are able to voice their concerns, and cover a range of interests from land trusts and conservation easements, to the preservation of the ranching heritage and lifestyle within the region. One example is the Community Agriculture Alliance (CAA), which was formed by a group of local ranchers in the 1990s. The catalyst for the formation of the CAA was the controversial use of Western culture and imagery for the branding of the ski resort. Several

ranchers mentioned how the resort utilized images of cowboys, horses, and barns, without conversations with the ranching community as to how they felt about their culture and heritage being represented in this way. As explained by I-3, a second-generation rancher:

The ski area promoted the Western image and the ski instructors wore cowboy hats and Billy Kidd always has his cowboy hat on. It's not who we are. It's not ranching. What are they trying to be? I don't know…So there was a disconnect. And truly part of that disconnect is where the Community Ag Alliance grew out of. Because this resort community… didn't understand what was important to us.

At the same time, the rapid growth of tourism development during the late 1990s raised concerns among ranchers regarding the future of ranching and agriculture. As acknowledged in a conversation with the Executive Director of the CAA: *"it became real apparent to a number of the leaders here that if something was not done to try to preserve agriculture, it would be lost"*. Thus, the growing presence of tourism and amenity migration was again the instigator for social capital development amongst ranchers. The CAA was the first organization of its kind within the county that provided ranchers with a formal channel of communication through which they were able to approach the Steamboat Ski and Resort Corporation (SSRC) and work together to alleviate their concerns. It has since continued to develop partnerships and cooperative ventures with the SSRC that support ranchers and preserve the agricultural heritage of the region.

The creation of Rendezvous Ranch Days (an annual family-friendly event held at the base of the ski resort) by the CAA and the SSRC is one such example., This event showcases the ranching industry and promotes awareness of its importance within the county through providing hands-on opportunities to meet ranchers and their animals and learn about ranching issues related to open space, land prices, and water conservation, among others. Numerous

ranchers were observed as playing a key role in sharing their knowledge and culture with interested tourists, amenity migrants, and residents, through bringing their animals, and setting up games and informational booths.

This formal collaboration is an example of how bridging social capital can link different groups and encourage information diffusion, knowledge sharing, and the creation of new contacts (Putnam, 2000). By focusing on an area of common interest, namely the preservation of the ranching culture and landscape, both ranching and tourism interests have been able to benefit in different ways. CAA representatives described this event as providing a broad platform for ranchers to disseminate information regarding the importance of the local ranching culture and the need to protect working ranchlands. As further explained by one rancher, they now have the opportunity to retain control over their image and culture that is shared with tourists and amenity migrants.

At the same time, the SSRC is able to reinforce the Western image that forms the basis of the marketing and branding of the resort. As explained by one senior manager at SSRC: *"It's a really good partnership…we do what we can to partner and support them [ranchers]…and of course it ties so nicely into our Western image"*. This concerted alignment of ranching and tourism interests has helped increase dialogue between ranching and tourism interests, demonstrating to both how collaborative efforts can be mutually beneficial. Such bridging ties are undoubtedly an important step for groups and communities looking to take control of their future.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined some of the socio-cultural changes associated with mountain resort tourism and amenity migration that are affecting ranchers within the region surrounding Steamboat Springs. The use of social capital as a heuristic device to explore these changes is one of the major contributions of this study. Three key observations can be made from this use of social capital. First, mountain resort tourism and amenity migration have not necessarily contributed to a loss of social capital amongst ranchers, but rather, its transformation. Although the introduction of amenity migrants into the rural landscape has arguably diminished the generalized trust and reciprocity demonstrated by ranchers to newcomers, it has also strengthened existing bonding networks between ranchers, and personalized norms of trust and reciprocity.

Second, while amenity migrants and their differing perspectives have resulted in various rancher-amenity migrant conflicts, they have also encouraged ranchers to informally and formally band together to protect their land and operations. The ability of ranchers to successful manage this time of change is indicated by the existence of positive social capital outcomes such as grassroots democracy and empowerment. Thus, although mountain resort tourism and amenity migration have diminished the willingness of ranchers to develop informal bridging networks with their new neighbors, they have helped strengthen existing bonds between ranchers, and encouraged them to adapt and utilize more formal bridging and linking networks to address divergent interests. This demonstrates a high level of social capital and also adds to our understanding of social capital as a nuanced and complex phenomenon, as well as providing support for its value as a lens for studying rural social change.

Finally, the importance of a balanced combination of bonding and bridging social capital should be acknowledged, as both play a key role in developing trust and mutuality within a community (Cox, 1995). Informal bonding ties between ranchers have encouraged

solidarity and the cooperative behavior necessary for survival, whether through neighborly assistance or encouraging collective action. The development of formal bridging and linking networks has also helped ranchers access resources and opportunities possessed by the tourism industry that have helped communicate the importance of ranching to tourists, amenity migrants, and the wider community.

The other major contribution of this study is its focus on ranchers' perspectives of the socio-cultural effects of tourism and amenity migration. This is a vital area of research inquiry, given the current pace of change that is occurring within ranchlands throughout the Rocky Mountain West and the way in which amenity migration appears to be altering traditional patterns of socialization. Of particular concern for ranchers appears to be the differing expectations and understanding of what is appropriate neighborly behavior, as indicated by the degree of social interaction with neighbors, and proper maintenance of ranchlands, as well as a willingness to assist one another and become a part of the community.

This exploratory study builds upon research by Larsen, et al., (2007) and Larsen and Hutton (2012) and examines the various processes that are producing, maintaining, and eroding socio-cultural differences between ranchers and amenity migrants in regions undergoing rural restructuring. However, additional research that clarifies and elaborates on these findings should be undertaken. In particular, a detailed examination of amenity migrant perspectives on ranchland ownership and management would complement this research and better highlight areas of tension and common interest. This would advance academic discourse on the socio-cultural changes occurring in areas surrounding resort communities and other high-amenity regions. As suggested by Golding (2014), "culture clash" can also have negative social consequences for amenity migrants, in the form of unfriendliness and social exclusion by the local population. Alternatively, as argued by Armstrong and Stedman

(2013), permanent residents (such as ranchers) may perceive greater levels of culture clash than amenity migrants, which can exacerbate notions of "otherness" and separation between these two groups. Then again, the findings of this study suggest that newcomers and long-standing residents may actually occupy more common ground than is expected by either group (Smith & Krannich, 2000).

In the case of Routt County, although ranchers have managed to maintain levels of social capital among themselves, there is still a need to improve ranching-amenity migrant relationships and build bridging social capital. Research has indicated the importance of increased inter-community interactions as a way of breaking down existing stereotypes and perceptions of otherness between permanent residents and newcomers (Armstrong & Stedman, 2013; Smith & Krannich, 2000). While community leaders in Routt County cannot change the semi-permanent nature of amenity migrants or their desire for peace and solitude, they can encourage more frequent interaction between ranchers and their new neighbors to help develop bridging networks that may reduce cultural misunderstandings and lead to a better understanding of one another's expectations. Future research should therefore include a larger sample size of ranchers, in addition to amenity migrants, to examine how social capital is developed, maintained, or even eroded within and between each of these groups, to gain a more nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural landscape that exists within Routt County.

As this study has focused specifically upon rancher perspectives within Routt County, care must be taken in making direct generalizations to other destinations where ranching is impacted by the growing demands of tourism and amenity-based development. Nevertheless, many of the issues identified are potentially comparable to those faced by ranchers living in other high-amenity regions throughout the Rocky Mountain West and beyond that are experiencing widespread growth and development associated with tourism and amenity migration. Future research might specifically compare the ranching landscape with other rural

landscapes with respect to changes in social capital that stem from rural restructuring, including but not limited to tourism and amenity migration.

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Table 1. Rancher-related interviews

Interviewee number	**Role**	**Sampling**
1	Rancher Representative of a ranching-related organization*	P
2	Rancher Ranch-tourism operator	P
3	Rancher	P
4	Representative of ranching-related organization*	S
5	Representative of ranching-related organization*	P
6	Rancher	S
7	Rancher	S
8	Rancher Representative of ranching-related organization*	S

*The names of these organizations have not been specified to ensure that the identities of these ranchers remain anonymous

Table 2. Manual data analysis: Example of identified themes and sub-themes

1 Ranching-tourism relationship
- 1.2 Ranching and winter tourism
- 1.3 Ranching and summer tourism
- 1.4 Love-hate relationship between tourism and ranching
  - 1.4.1 Rancher creation of tourism
  - 1.4.2 Issues that result from the ranching-tourism interface
    - 1.4.2.1 Conflict over the Western 'image' and tourism marketing and promotion of Steamboat Springs
    - 1.4.2.2 Effects of tourism on intergenerational ranching
    - 1.4.2.3 Rising costs of land and insufficient means of income
    - 1.4.2.4 Ranching no longer economically viable
    - 1.4.2.5 Land fragmentation and subdivision
    - 1.4.2.6 Real estate development within the open lands
    - 1.4.2.7 Effects of tourism on ranching sense of community
    - 1.4.2.8 'Deep pocket' ranchers – amenity migrant ranchers
    - 1.4.2.9 Feared loss of ranching from Routt County
  - 1.4.3 Rancher incorporation of tourism products and services